



6 Sleep and Awake States

Learning about your newborn

This handout for new parents describes a baby's 6 sleep and awake states.

Understanding your baby's sleep and awake states and the way your baby moves between states will help you:

- Predict what your baby needs.
- Make decisions about what to do and how to respond.
- Understand your baby's temperament.
- Respond early to prevent crying later.

Deep Sleep

Signs of deep sleep are:

- Regular, smooth breathing.
- Eyes are shut and motionless, no *rapid eye movement* (REM).
- Body is still, with a "startle" every once in a while.
- Baby does not respond to stimuli. This is called *habituation*.

Light (REM) Sleep

Signs of light sleep are:

- More responsive and more easily awakened by outside noises and movement.
- Irregular breathing: pause, then faster, another pause, then faster.
- Eye movement under lids.
- Facial and body movements.
- Baby startles.

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Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Perinatal Education:
206-598-4003

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Care Clinic:
206-598-4070

Drowsy (Transitional Phase)

Signs of drowsiness are:

- Neither asleep or awake.
- Wide range of activity – active to quiet.
- Tries to reach a more “organized” (controlled) state.
- Eyes may flutter open.
- Squirming or jerky movements.
- Frowning.
- May whimper or cry out.

Quiet Alert

Signs of a quiet alert state are:

- Bright look and focused eyes.
- Furrowed brow and “ooh” face.
- Most attentive, responsive, smiling.
- Moves smoothly and keeps still.
- Breathing is regular.
- Able to interact, process, and learn.

Active Alert (Fussyness)

An active alert stage may follow a quiet alert state. Signs of an active alert state are:

- Irregular breathing.
- Agitation, fussing, or whimpering.
- Much more body activity – writhing or jerky movements.
- Tries to organize self, but cannot.

Crying

During the crying state, a baby may move around a lot, and then may stop briefly, as if to listen. Different kinds of crying may be your baby’s way of telling you:

- They want your attention.
- They are hungry or need their diaper changed.
- They are tense or overstimulated: “I’ve had enough! I’ve reached my limit!”

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